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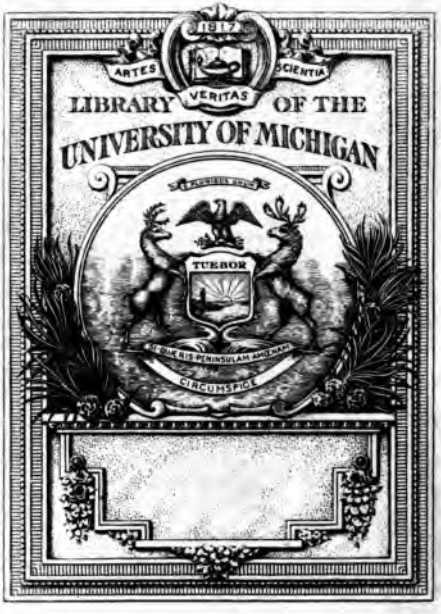

BEQUEST OF
DANIEL L. QUIRK, JR.

French Without a Master: a Farce in One Act: by Tristan Bernard: Translated by Barrett H. Clark

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FRENCH WITHOUT A MASTER

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

PERCY ..... *The Interpreter*
JEAN-JACQUES CHANOINE-MALHERBE *Séraphine's Father*
GERALD FORSYTH..... *A young Englishman*
A POLICE OFFICER
A HOTEL PORTER
MLLE. SÉRAPHINE CHANOINE-MALHERBE
THE CASHIER *An Englishwoman of about twenty-five years of age*

SCENE:—*A small London hotel.*

TIME:—*The present.*

FRENCH WITHOUT A MASTER

SCENE:—*A small office in a hotel. There is a large door center, giving upon the hallway. Downstage and up-stage to the right are doors; similar doors on the left. Half-way downstage on the left is the* CASHIER'S *desk, with inkstands and register. On the walls are posters and train schedules. Half-way downstage and a little to left of center is a table covered with magazines, etc., and a telephone. As the curtain rises, the* PORTER *is seen seated on a small stool just below the* CASHIER'S *desk. A moment later, enter* GERALD *and* SÉRAPHINE, *each with a valise.* SÉRAPHINE *is typically French and wears stylish clothes of the latest cut;* GERALD *is equally well dressed. He goes to the* PORTER, *lays down his valise, takes that of* SÉRAPHINE *and places it beside his own.*

GERALD. We'd like two rooms, please.

PORTER. One moment, sir; I'll call the cashier.

GERALD. Is there a telegraph office around here?

PORTER. Yes, sir, it's just around the corner. Shall I take your message, sir?

GERALD. No, I'll take it myself.

(*The* PORTER *goes out.*)

SÉRAPHINE. Mon chéri, je voudrais une chambre exposée au soleil.

GERALD. Oui, oui, ma chère.

SÉRAPHINE. Je suis très lasse. Comment dit-on? Tired?

GERALD. Oui—yes. Dearest, you must learn to speak English all the time; we don't want people to stare at us.

SÉRAPHINE. Oh, but I do not know well how the English speaks itself.

GERALD. Nonsense, you're getting along splendidly.

(*Enter* CASHIER, *up-stage right.*)

CASHIER. How do you do? You'd like a room?

GERALD. Two, if you please.

CASHIER. We have two nice rooms on the second floor.

GERALD. That's capital!

CASHIER. (*Turning the register toward* GERALD *and handing him a pen*) Just sign here, please. That's right.

SÉRAPHINE. (*Looking over* GERALD'S *shoulder*) Ah, tu es—!

CASHIER. Would you mind waiting a moment? I'll have the rooms ready presently. (*She goes out, up-stage, right*)

SÉRAPHINE. Ah, Mister Parkinson! Mrs. Parkinson! Que c'est drôle!

GERALD. Certainly; I couldn't give our real names. It would be nice to put down "Mr. Gerald Forsyth and Mlle. Séraphine Chanoine-Malherbe" —especially as you told me yourself that your father knew of this hotel, and might come here and find us—nous surprendre ici.

SÉRAPHINE. It is a wicked thing, this that we have done. I know too, my father, he remember this hotel, well. He know the name: Hotel Gainsborough: he has been here before. Ecoute-moi bien—listen me—*to* me, dear. I think I have seen his gray hat.

GERALD. But there are hundreds of gray hats in London.

SÉRAPHINE. But I am sure I have seen the—the —paternal hat.

GERALD. Nonsense, my dear!

SÉRAPHINE. Ah, mon chéri!

GERALD. Don't say "Mon chéri!"—say "My dear."

SÉRAPHINE. My dear! Oh, I wish I were safely married to you. Oh, how wicked to run away like this!

GERALD. But we had to! It was the only way to make him consent.

SÉRAPHINE. But if your—patron? Employer? would give you an interest in the business?

GERALD. Yes?

SÉRAPHINE. Then Papa would have let me be married with—*to* you?

GERALD. Yes, dear, I know. My employer, however, doesn't see it in that light. Wait three months, he says, and then we'll see. Well, if your Papa refused, we had to do this. And here we are.

SÉRAPHINE. You are right, dear; you always are.

GERALD. And our elopement is at the expense of the company.

SÉRAPHINE. Bad, bad boy!

GERALD. And now I must leave you for a few minutes. I must send a telegram to the chief.

SÉRAPHINE. And you will leave me all alone? What if I would wish for anything?

GERALD. Well, you can speak English.

(*Enter the* CASHIER.)

SÉRAPHINE. No, no—or only with those who also speak the French. I'm so afraid!

GERALD. But, there must be an interpreter here—(*To the* CASHIER) Isn't there?

CASHIER. Of course. He should be here in a moment. Meantime, the rooms are ready.

GERALD. (*To* SÉRAPHINE) I'll take you up, and then run to the office.

(*They go out, up-stage right.*)

CASHIER. (*To the* PORTER, *who enters, center*) Why hasn't our interpreter come yet?

PORTER. Oh, Graham? He's sick, but he's sent another fellow in his place. He's out in the hall now.

CASHIER. Tell him to come in. (*The* PORTER *goes out at the back, and beckons to someone in the hall. A moment later enter* PERCY, *a respectable tramp. His clothes are well-worn, but not ragged, and they fit him rather tightly,—his trousers also are too short. He has not had a shave for some time. He tips his hat—an old "derby"—timidly, then walks slowly to the center of the stage, looking about uneasily. The* CASHIER *addresses him somewhat sharply*) So you have come to take Mr. Graham's place? (PERCY *nods*) You have been told the conditions, I believe; six shillings a day. Now understand, we want a good interpreter, serious and attentive to business. All you have to do is wait here until any foreigners come, and then help them. Understand? (PERCY *again nods*) Good. (*The* CASHIER *goes out, up-stage left*)

PERCY. (*To the* PORTER, *after a short pause*) Many foreigners come here?

PORTER. Oh, I don't know! Few French now and then; depends on the season.

PERCY. (*A little disturbed*) Oh—many foreigners just now?

PORTER. Not so many.

PERCY. (*A little more at ease*) Do you think any'll come to-day?

PORTER. Can't say—Here, take your cap. (*He*

hands PERCY *a cap with the words "INTERPRETE" written on the front. The* PORTER *then goes out at the back*)

PERCY. (*Hat in hand, as he reads the inscription*) In-ter-preet. (*Puts on the cap*) Good! Hope them blarsted frog-eaters keep away. Don't know a single word of French, er German, er I-talian, er Spanish, er any of them dialects. Good thing for an interpreter! But I'm no millionaire, and them six shillin's! Hm! But I mightily fear conversation may languish if I meet any o' them foreigners.

(*Re-enter the* CASHIER.)

CASHIER. I forgot to ask you something a moment ago: you know there are a great many interpreters who know all the languages of Europe and don't know their mother tongue. You speak English well, don't you?

PERCY. Perfectly, Madam.

CASHIER. Good. I wanted to be quite sure, you know. You didn't speak when I was talking to you.

PERCY. Ye can rest quiet on that point, Ma'am. I speaks English admi-rably.

CASHIER. We haven't many French people at this season. (*The telephone bell rings. The* CASHIER *runs to the table, center, and takes off the receiver. A moment later she lays it on the table*) It's from Paris. (PERCY, *who is comfortably leaning against the* CASHIER'S *desk, does not move a hair. The* CASHIER *goes to him*) Someone's telephoning from Paris. It's in French! Are you deaf? Go to the telephone!

PERCY. (*Advancing slowly to the table, and picking up the receiver*) Hello? (*Lays the receiver down, and faces the audience in despair*) That's it; they're French. (*Again listening, and*

again laying down the receiver) Don't understand a word! (*Speaking into the transmitter*) Oui, oui, oui. (*He is at his wits' end*)

CASHIER. What do they say?

PERCY. What do they say? Oh, nothing very important.

CASHIER. People don't telephone from Paris to say nothing very important!

PERCY. (*Again speaking into the telephone*) Oui, oui.—Yes, they're French, no doubt about it. They—they want some rooms, and so I said "Oui, oui."

CASHIER. Well, is that all they say? When? How much do they want to pay? Ask them, ask them!

PERCY. (*Hesitating*) They want—four rooms.

CASHIER. When?

PERCY For—er—next Thursday.

CASHIER. What kind of rooms?

PERCY. On the second floor.

CASHIER. Tell them we have only two on that floor at present, but another will be vacant the day they arrive—on the fifteenth. Or else we could let them have two first-rate rooms on the third floor, if they like.

PERCY. Do you want me to tell them that?

CASHIER. Yes, and hurry. (PERCY *hesitates*) What are you waiting for?

PERCY. (*Dumbfounded*) Eh?—er—(*Listening at the telephone*) Sonfrancaispollyvoogrllgon—Oh! (*He hangs up the receiver*) Whew, that's over with, thank Heaven!

CASHIER. They must be rich—You know it costs ten shillings every three minutes to telephone from Paris.

PERCY. Ten bob for three minutes? What's that come to by the hour?

CASHIER. Ten pounds.

PERCY. Ten—?!

(*Enter* CHANOINE-MALHERBE, *center.*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. C'est ici l'Hôtel Gainsborough?

PERCY. Oui, oui. (*He slowly turns round his hat, hiding the word INTERPRÈTE*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Ya-t-il ici un jeune monsieur et une jeune demoiselle?

PERCY. Oui, oui. (*He retreats toward the lower left door, and disappears*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? Où est l'interprète?

CASHIER. What do you wish?

CHANOINE-MALHEBRE. Bonjour, Madame M. Forsyth, est-il ici?

CASHIER. Forsyth?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui, Forsyth.

CASHIER. No, there's no one registered here with that name. No!

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Voyons, un jeune homme et une jeune demoiselle?

CASHIER. I can't understand a word you are saying. Interpreter! (*Enter the* PORTER) Have you seen the interpreter?

PORTER. He was here a moment ago.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*Taking a pocket-dictionary from his valise*) Commissaire, police—here!

PORTER. Wot's 'e saying?

CASHIER. I think he wants to see a police officer. (*Pointing*) Just around the corner.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Non,—here!

CASHIER. He wants to see the officer here.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui, oui—here. (*Gives the* PORTER *a coin*)

PORTER. Thank you, sir. (*Aside*) Ten bob!

CASHIER. (*To* PORTER) Run around to the station and get an officer—then the Frenchman can tell him what he wants.

PORTER. But 'e don't know no English.

CASHIER. We have an interpreter, haven't we? Run, now.

(*The* PORTER *starts to go, but stops when the Frenchman says to him*:)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Je voudrais une chambre.

CASHIER. Chambre? Chambre? Oh, I know what that means: you want a *room*. Very well, we'll give you a "chambre." (*To the* PORTER) Here, take this gentleman to number seventeen. (*She gives the* PORTER *a key*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*To* PORTER) Prenez donc ma valise.

PORTER. Yes, sir.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Saprelotte, ma valise!

PORTER. Certainly, sir.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*Pointing to the valise*) La voilà, sot!

PORTER. (*Taking the valise*) Oh, 'is bag!

(*The* PORTER *and* CHANOINE-MALHERBE *go out, up-stage left.*)

CASHIER. Where is that interpreter? (*Goes out, up-stage left*)

(*Enter* GERALD *and* SÉRAPHINE, *up-stage right.*)

SÉRAPHINE. Then you must go? You will not stay longer?

GERALD. Only to the telegraph office. I'll be back at once.

SÉRAPHINE. Oh, I am so afraid. I thought I heard the voice of Papa.

GERALD. Imagination.—I'll be back in no time.

SÉRAPHINE. Good-bye, chéri.

GERALD. Say "Dearest!"

SÉRAPHINE. Dearest! (SÉRAPHINE *goes out up-stage right,* GERALD *center*)

(*Re-enter* PERCY, *on tip-toe.*)

PERCY. Nobody here! Half-past ten, and this has got to last till midnight. (*He goes up-stage and examines the train-schedules*) No train from Paris till seven. Nine hours of peace and quiet. (*He sits down on the stool by the desk and takes a cigar from his pocket*)

(*Re-enter* CASHIER.)

CASHIER. Interpreter, where have you been all this time?

PERCY. All what time?

CASHIER. I told you to stay here.

PERCY. Well, I—I—I just stepped out—because—I heard someone crying for help—in Spanish!

CASHIER. You stepped out so quickly that you turned your hat all the way around!

PERCY. Yes—yes.

CASHIER. Well, are you going to fix it? (PERCY *does so*) Sit down. (PERCY *sits down*) Now stay right here. There's a Frenchman here who doesn't understand a word of English. He has sent for a police officer. I don't know what he wants.

PERCY. Neither do I.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*Outside*) Apportez-moi du vin. Garçon, garçon!

PERCY. Listen to it! Whew!

(*Enter* CHANOINE-MALHERBE, *down-stage left, at the moment when the Officer appears in the door center.*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Ce commissaire—? Ah!

OFFICER. Well, what is it? Is this the gentleman who wanted me? Why couldn't you have called at the station yourself?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui.

OFFICER. No "*Oui*" about it. That's the way we do things in our country.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui.

OFFICER. I can see you're a foreigner, only next time you'll know what to do.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui.

CASHIER. He doesn't understand a word of English.

OFFICER. And I don't understand a word of French. We'll get on fine together!

CASHIER. (*To* PERCY, *who has been trying to escape*) Interpreter!

PERCY. (*Coming down-stage*) Ye-es?

OFFICER. (*To* PERCY) Find out what he wants?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*To* HARRY) Ah, M. l'Interprète!

PERCY. Oui, oui.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Dites-lui que je me nomme Jean-Jacques Chanoine-Malherbe, que je viens de Paris pour trouver ma fille qui s'en est allée de chez moi avec un jeune homme, et——

OFFICER. What's he say?

PERCY. It's a long story. Very complicated—hm—this gentleman before you is a—Frenchman.

OFFICER. I know that!

PERCY. He came to London—just—just as Frenchmen do come to London.

OFFICER. But why does he need an officer?

PERCY. Wait, wait, I must have time to translate.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Dites-lui que——

PERCY. Exactly. (*To the* OFFICER) Do you want to know why this Frenchman wants an officer? Well—he's been robbed. A pocket-book. Now this gentleman got off—got off—the express——

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Dites-lui——

PERCY. Wait! (*To* OFFICER) Got off the express at Victoria, when a mysterious-looking individual came up—and took his pocket-book.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Très bien!

PERCY. Oui, oui. (*He tries to get away again, when* CHANOINE-MALHERBE *takes out his pocket-book*)

OFFICER. He's got *two* pocket-books!

PERCY. Didn't you know that? All Frenchmen have two pocket-books.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Voici sa photographie.

OFFICER. The thief's photograph?!

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui, oui.

OFFICER. These Frenchmen! How did he get the thief's picture?

PERCY. I forgot to tell you, but the man who stole the pocket-book was an old acquaintance.

OFFICER. What name? Ask him.

PERCY. The name? Hm—Why his name is—er—Gaston——

OFFICER. How do you spell it?

PERCY. Why do you want me to spell it?—G-e-s-t-n-n——

OFFICER. How do you pronounce it?

PERCY. Gás-ton. (*Emphasis on the first syllable*)

OFFICER. Very good. I'll start an investigation.

PERCY. Yes, you'd better go at once. Besides, this gentleman is rather tired.

OFFICER. Good-morning, sir. (*He goes out, center*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Qu-est-ce qu'il a dit?—Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit?

PERCY. Oui, oui.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui, oui, oui—la paix!

CASHIER. What's he saying?

PERCY. Nothing at all.

CASHIER. He seems to be disturbed about something.

PERCY. We shouldn't bother him. He says to let him alone.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Quel mauvais interprète!

CASHIER. Now what's he saying?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*Looking at his dictionary*) Ig-no-rant In-ter-pre-ter!

CASHIER. He means "ignorant." You are an ignorant interpreter! But I thought——

PERCY. No, no, no—Ig-no-rant in French means —Oh, if you only knew what that meant!

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*To* CASHIER *as he goes out, center*) Oh, là, là! Un pareil hôtel, et un pareil interprète!

CASHIER. He is disturbed, isn't he?

PERCY. Not at all, he's charmed. That's the way with the French.

CASHIER. Wait a moment. Stay here while I'm gone. (*She goes out, up-stage right*)

(*Enter* SÉRAPHINE *up-stage right.*)

SÉRAPHINE. M. l'Interprète!

PERCY. (*Pretending to have a sore throat*) Sore throat—can't talk.

SÉRAPHINE. Ah, then you cannot speak?

PERCY. (*Forgetting about his throat*) Oh, you can speak English! Why didn't you say so at first?

SÉRAPHINE. Now you can speak. Eh bien, parlez——

PERCY. (*Coughs*) Not at all well. It's a little better. Don't mention it.

SERAPHINE. Ya-t-il un bureau de télégraphes près d'ici?

PERCY. What's the good of talking French when you can speak English so well? That's no way to learn a language.

SÉRAPHINE. I cannot speak well the English.

PERCY. All the more reason why you shouldn't speak French. I warn you, I refuse to answer when you speak French.

SÉRAPHINE. All right. I tell you—(*She catches sight of her father's hat on the table*) Oh!

PERCY. What's the matter?

SÉRAPHINE. Who is that gray hat?

PERCY. A Frenchman left it here a moment ago.

SÉRAPHINE. (*Examining the hat*) Oh, c'est le chapeau de mon père!

PERCY. Certainly.

SÉRAPHINE. I'm going to my room.

PERCY. That's a good idea.

(SÉRAPHINE *goes out, up-stage right. Enter* GERALD, *center.*)

GERALD. Interprète.

PERCY. This is getting a bit too warm for me! (*He turns to* GERALD *with an air of defiance*) You frog-eating beggar——

GERALD. Frog-eater yourself, you blasted bloke from Clerkenwall——

PERCY. (*Effusively, to* GERALD *as he hastens to shake hands with him*) Ah, you speak *English!* You know I'm a little shaky on my French, though of course I know German, Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Spanish——

GERALD. You know Spanish?—Que hora son?

PERCY. (*Laughs*) Well, I was saying——

GERALD. But I asked you a question. Que hora son? Well?

PERCY. Do you want an immediate answer?

GERALD. How long does it take you to let me know what time it is?

PERCY. Oh, it's eleven o'clock—that's easy. Listen to me: I have a favor to ask you. There's a Frenchman here and I don't understand his dialect.

GERALD. Where is he?

PERCY. We'll find him. Very good of you to help me. He must be in the smoking-room now.

Here's my cap. (*He places his cap on* GERALD'S *head*) Mister! (*He calls out through the door down-stage right*) Mister!

GERALD. Say "Monsieur."

PERCY. Mushir, mushir. (*To* GERALD) I want to tell him that there's a good interpreter here.

GERALD. "Un bon interprète."

PERCY. Bone interpreet. Mushir, bone interpreet.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*Outside*) Un bon interprète? Bien! (*Enter* CHANOINE-MALHERBE, *down-stage right.* GERALD *recognizes* SÉRAPHINE'S *father and pulls his hat over his eyes*) Ah, celui-ci? Je voudrais qu'on me serve mon déjeuner tout de suite. (GERALD *makes his escape*) Hein? Quoi?

PERCY. He's the one, not me! Good-bye.

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Seigneur! (*He goes out, down-stage right*)

(*There come sounds of a scuffle out in the hallway. Enter* OFFICER *followed by another officer who holds* GERALD *tight by the collar.*)

OFFICER. Here's your thief. Just as I was walking past I saw him, and the minute I looked into his face I recognized him from the photograph. Bring the Frenchman here. We'll show these foreigners what Scotland Yard can do! And come back yourself, we'll need you later.

(PERCY *goes out, up-stage right.*)

GERALD. What do you mean by this? What's the charge? You'll hear from this! Do you know I'm related to——

OFFICER. Just keep calm, young fellow. (*He refers to his note-book*) Your name is Gas-tnnn—

(*Enter* SÉRAPHINE, *up-stage right.*)

SÉRAPHINE. Oh, dearest, dearest!

OFFICER. Arrest that woman, she's an accomplice.

SÉRAPHINE. (*As the other officer takes her by the arm*) Qu'y-a-t-il?

GERALD. You were right this morning. There's the gray hat!

OFFICER. Silence! No communication between the prisoners! They may be part of a dangerous band.

(*Enter* CHANOINE-MALHERBE, *down-stage right.*)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Ma fille, ma fille! (*To the* OFFICER) Mon ami, voici la demoiselle dont je vous ai parlé tout à l'heure, et——

OFFICER. All right, all right. But is this the man who stole your pocket-book?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Oui.

GERALD. Does he say I stole his pocket-book? (*To* CHANOINE-MALHERBE) Vous lui avez dit que j'ai volé votre portefeuille?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Jamais de la vie!

GERALD. You see, he says he never said anything of the sort.

OFFICER. I don't understand French. Come on to the station.

GERALD. (*To* CHANOINE-MALHERBE) Votre fille va au commissariat!

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. Jamais. (*Takes* SÉRAPHINE *by the arm*)

(*Enter* CASHIER, *up-stage right.*)

CASHIER. What is the trouble?

SÉRAPHINE. But I am his daughter!

OFFICER. What's that to me?

(*The telephone bell rings. The* CASHIER *takes the receiver and says:*)

CASHIER. It's Paris. They want M. Gerald Forsyth. (*Into the telephone*) There's no one——

GERALD. Here I am!

CASHIER. But your name is Parkinson!

GERALD. It's also Forsyth!

OFFICER. And also Gas-nnn——

(GERALD *goes to the telephone.*)

GERALD. Allô! (*Pause*) It's my chief in Paris —oui, oui. (*Another pause*) It seems he telephoned here a little while ago and thought he was connected with a lunatic asylum.—Merci, merci bien!—He is going to give me an interest in the business.

SÉRAPHINE. Ah, Papa, Papa! Gerald va entrer dans la Maison!

(*Enter* PERCY.)

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. C'est vrai? Alors, je vous donne ma fille! (*He goes down-stage. The* OFFICER *starts to conduct the prisoners out*)

OFFICER. You'll have to come along now.

PERCY. Stop, Officer! You don't understand. The Frenchman says he has found his pocketbook. He told me it was all a mistake. (*To* CHANOINE-MALHERBE) Oui, oui?

CHANOINE-MALHERBE. (*Good-naturedly*) Oui, oui, mon ami.

PERCY. See there?

OFFICER. Then there's nothing more to be done? (*The prisoners are released*) You're free!

CURTAIN.

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BARRETT H. CLARK

General Editor

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